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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Eighth session

Agenda item 6

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review

Bahrain

Addendum

**Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented
by the State under review**

Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review

1. Bahrain thanked the members of the Human Rights Council for their support resulting in the successful re-election of Bahrain to the Council, noting the responsibility that comes with it. Bahrain noted the adoption on 26 May 2008, in the presence of a representative from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), of its Action Plan to Implement Bahrain's Pledges, Voluntary Commitments and UPR Outcomes (the Action Plan). Bahrain commended OHCHR on the compilation and summary reports prepared, and thanked the troika and the UPR Working Group for their contribution. It informed the meeting that it tasked a team of its UPR delegation to observe and draw lessons from the 15 other States reviewed under the UPR designated alongside Bahrain, recognizing and promoting recognition that UPR is a process with several stages and with successive four-year time frames. It noted its appreciation of the burden and the privilege of being the first State at every stage of the UPR process.

2. During its three-year term on the Council, Bahrain re-committed itself to striving to strengthen its effectiveness as a mechanism for international dialogue and cooperation on human rights. It also re-committed itself to striving to establish the UPR as a unique vehicle for international cooperation on measures to improve the human rights situation on the ground through implementation of the UPR outcomes. Bahrain also committed to publicizing and promoting dissemination of the UPR report on Bahrain adopted by the Council; to studying the report carefully and harmonize the Action Plan with the report; to encourage national stakeholders, civil society and media to study the report carefully and to promote awareness and advocacy in support of the Council report.

3. Bahrain highlighted some aspects of the Action Plan, and stated that it is also available on the website of its Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Bahrain stated that the Action Plan is the product of a transparent and participatory national process which sought to involve all national stakeholders. It stated that the Action Plan addresses actions to fulfil or implement:

- The pledges that Bahrain made in seeking election to the Council in 2006 and in seeking re-election in 2008;
- The voluntary commitments contained in the Bahrain UPR report submitted to the Council;
- Responses to the suggestions and issues raised in the interactive dialogue during the review of Bahrain and in the draft report from the UPR Working Group, in light of the outcome adopted in plenary.

4. Bahrain stated that the specific areas for action set out in the Action Plan fall into four broad categories:

- (1) Actions related to strengthening Bahrain's national system for protecting and promoting human rights regarding both specific national human rights institutions such as human rights commissions, as well as institutions of government such as the legislature, the executive and the judiciary that are vital to protecting and promoting human rights;
- (2) Actions to enhance the protection of vulnerable and "at risk" groups in Bahrain such as, for example, foreign workers, women, children and human rights defenders;

- (3) Actions to advance the progressive realization of specific human rights in Bahrain such as freedom of speech, expression, assembly and association, and equality and non-discrimination;
- (4) Actions to strengthen Bahrain's international cooperation with the United Nations, and regional and bilateral intergovernmental arrangements for the protection and promotion of human rights, starting with the Council and the UPR.

5. Bahrain stated that every aspect of the *Action Plan*, from design and implementation to monitoring, evaluating and reporting, will be guided by the values and principles of participation and inclusion of all relevant national stakeholders, governmental and non-governmental, including the judiciary, members of parliament, NGOs and political societies and the private sector, as appropriate; transparency; accountability; cooperation between the Government and the people of the Kingdom of Bahrain, as well as between the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Council; and commitment to results.

6. Finally, Bahrain added the two following steps in its *Action Plan*: (1) to immediately proceed with a strategic programme to strengthen human rights capacities, both governmental and non-governmental; and (2) before the third session of the Working Group in December 2008, Bahrain plans to organize a regional comparative meeting on "Strengthening participatory UPR processes: learning from the UPRs undertaken thus far". The study of the Bahrain UPR team as one of the first 16 State reviews will be an input to this meeting.

7. Following the views expressed on the outcome of the review by States members and observers of the Council, as well as general comments made by other relevant stakeholders, Bahrain stated that it has included all relevant remarks on human rights from NGOs and other States, and added that the process was fully transparent, with the full participation of all societies in Bahrain, including through the hotline, the web page set up for this purpose, meetings and through the press. All comments, direct and indirect, were taken into account in the *Action Plan*. The draft action plan was also presented in the presence of ambassadors and other delegates. The Minister for Foreign Affairs stated that upon returning to Bahrain after the review of Bahrain during that during the Working Group, he had engaged in several debates on the outcome of the UPR, through direct televised debates with the chairman of the Bahrain Human Rights Society. He indicated that all participants commented on the transparency of the process, following which the action plan was compiled, and a representative from OHCHR was invited to attend the launching of the action plan, along with NGOs. Bahrain added that it asked NGOs and human rights societies to participate in the implementation of the action plan. In response to Slovenia's question, Bahrain answered that paragraph 9 on page 6 of the *Action Plan* addresses enhanced protection for the rights of domestic workers, especially women.

8. The Minister stated that on the same day as the present discussion, Bahrain was launching a national conference on understanding the concept of "gender", under the patronage of H.M. King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, King of the Kingdom of Bahrain, reflecting the importance attached by the Government to this issue. The Minister added that it had made an important amendment on 4 May 2008 to its press law by abolishing the punishment of imprisonment of journalists and abolishing censorship on publications. Bahrain then drew attention to the invitation extended to and the presence of a representative of OHCHR to observe at the first workshop, held on 29 May 2008 conducted by the UPR working team of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs on applying a human rights based approach. Bahrain informed the Council that this workshop is the first step the UPR working team has taken in its plan to conduct further workshops with the assistance of the UNDP in Bahrain and experts from OHCHR. Bahrain further underlined the establishment of a National Committee to

Combat Human Trafficking, which embodies members from the governmental sector, human rights societies and relevant NGOs, such as the migrant workers' protection society.

9. Finally, Bahrain stated that it is working on implementing a "project document" with the assistance of UNDP and in consultations with members of civil society. A representative of OHCHR observed the discussions between the Government and civil society regarding the drafting this project. This project proposal seeks to address the need for supporting Bahrain's *Action Plan* and provides a vehicle for its further development, based on needs and experiences implementation emerging over the present four-year UPR cycle. The project proposal seeks to address:

- The need to strengthen Bahrain's human rights database and information systems;
- The need for more effective implementation of Bahrain's obligations under international human rights treaties;
- The need to strengthen Bahrain's institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights;
- The need to strengthen Bahrain's institutions dealing with ratification of international human rights instruments and with the incorporation into national legislation of human rights treaties that Bahrain has ratified;
- The need to strengthen Bahrain's human rights capacities, both governmental and non-governmental, especially capacities for monitoring and evaluation;
- Specifically, the need to strengthen Bahrain's capacities to apply a human rights-based approach to development.

10. Bahrain reiterated that it takes human rights very seriously, and the need to empower its strongest resource which is its human resource, women and men alike, Bahrainis and non-Bahrainis alike. It stated that it needs the support of all, including country partners, the United Nations and OHCHR in the process of protecting human rights. While the situation in Bahrain is not perfect, the Minister stated that it sees UPR as an opportunity to develop the human rights condition in Bahrain.

11. In her intervention, the Deputy of the Higher Council for Women of Bahrain replied to the comment made by the Bahraini Women's Association. She affirmed that the Government is in permanent cooperation in this area with respect to the issue of citizenship, and hopes that the law will be adopted to enshrine and guarantee citizenship for that category. She stated that there is no objection to the issue of citizenship but that there are social constraints, and informed the Council of ongoing campaigns to sensitize society on the adoption of such a law, and to lift these reservations.

12. Bahrain stated that it has accepted all the recommendations and has incorporated them in the Action Plan which will be implemented, a process which started on 26 May 2008.
